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Interviewer (DNR Representative): Larry Wilson

Clarence Caskey (CCC enrollee,) voice will be in bold print.

DNR: Where is your home town Clarence?

Clarence: I am from Madrid, IA. A farming community at one time they mined coal up there.

DNR: So they quit mining coal because it became not profitable.

Clarence: Well I don't know if Connie got old or what happened but he had a mine just south of Madrid and then he had a mine just east of Madrid and then they ran into water and flooded it, so they had to quit that one. And I don't know when they stopped.

DNR: Well, one time Madrid or Iowa produced a lot of coal Clarence, the whole state.

Clarence: Well, I am telling you there was car load after car load; you couldn't believe the amount of coal they got. But the best coal around came out of Ohio and it was really good coal it was more slick.

DNR: John L. Lewis is from Lucas Iowa, you know the guy that later became president organized, started the United Mine Workers.

Clarence: He was one old tough buzzard.

DNR: Yah, when you looked at him you could tell he was a tough guy.

DNR: So how old were you when you enrolled in the C's Clarence?

Clarence: I don't remember. The only thing I remember at my age and I am guessing, but I was born in 1910.

DNR: You had to be 16 to join the CCC's and the CCC's started, no, excuse me, I mean you had to be 17 years old to join. And they started in 1933.

Clarence: I was older than that.

DNR: Well if you were born in 1910, the C's started in 33, 1910-20-30 there is 23 years. You were 23 when it was created.

Clarence: That sounds about right.

DNR: What did you do before you went to the CCC's? Did you graduate from High School?

Clarence: Yah.

DNR: Madrid? Good for you. What did you do between High School and joining the C's, was there much work?

Clarence: Well in the spring and summer my two uncles had farms and we would go out and help them shock oats and help them thrash.

DNR: OK. Anything in the off season when the farm work was done, anything you could find to do?

Clarence: Yes anything you could find to do. Well Madrid had a town band so every Saturday night we would go up and play. Back in those days we called it a peck horn, but now a day the instrument is called a French horn.

DNR: When did you learn to play the French horn?

Clarence: Oh way back, I did not really learn how to play it.

DNR: What was that called the instrument?

Clarence: It was called a peck horn, a timing instrument.

DNR: Hum, I thought you said it then became known as the French horn, no?

Clarence: Later, as I understand, I can't prove a thing, it is now a French horn and it has become a lot more sophisticated, it is a beautiful instrument.

DNR: When did you start doing that?

Clarence: Well the town gave us the instrument to play so we would get in the band.

DNR: So you would have been like in high school when that happened?

Clarence: Yes.

DNR: So anyone who wanted to be in the band, they would provide the instrument?

Clarence: Well, I was in the high school band; I went into that when I was in 7th or 8th grade. A little town back then, they didn't have any players; in fact they didn't have any players. In fact all the little towns around us didn't have any bands; there were very few bands in the state of Iowa, period.

DNR: Did you play the same instrument back then, the peck horn?

Clarence: Part of the time. Then they came out with a big beautiful baritone sax, and I did.

DNR: Did you teach yourself or did you have lessons?

Clarence: I taught myself on that. But of course I can read music.

DNR: You can?

Clarence: Yes, I can't read too well any more but I use too.

DNR: You did that in school, the baritone sax?

Clarence: Yah.

DNR: Isn't that something.

Clarence: We didn't have the things that you did today, we learned the hard way.

Another Person in the room: He doesn't use sheet music he plays the piano, but he just learned that by ear.

DNR: That is great. I guess you probably heard about my experience in the bell choir down at church there. I wanted to play in the bell choir with De Ann, she play in the bell choir, of course she played obviously clarinet in high school and piano and she can read music and all of that stuff. I don't know how to read music, I was a complete failure and I was so frustrated with that bell choir that I quit.

Clarence: I know now, I don't read at all now, but when I do play I play by ear. I am really getting too old to play now. Back in those days when times were tough as kids we started a dance band.

DNR: There were no malls to go to or video games?

Clarence: We made our own entertainment, so when times were bad, we got together we asked if we could play up town on the streets to get people to dance up on the streets.

DNR: Did you set out a hat or a cigar box, so people could throw a nickel or dime in?

Clarence: No, no. Your wife sounds like a very intelligent person.

DNR: Yes, I always said she was a lot smarter and better doing her job than I was at mine. And I meant that, she was a good student. We both went to Utah State University and she worked just about full time when she was going to school. Then after she got her bachelors degree then she got her masters degree and after that she was working towards another degree. That was after that she was working on moving to Iowa. Yes, she is sharp. Why did you enroll in the CCC's?

Clarence: Times were tough; my folks said we didn't have a lot anymore. We just didn't have much we planted a garden.

DNR: You needed work, you needed some income.

Clarence: And there wasn't any, nobody. You couldn't even find a job, let alone get one.

DNR: I talked to some guys Clarence that said they only work they could find was working on the farm, if they were lucky and they would get 50 cents a day.

Clarence: Well, I got \$1.00 a day and my meals and then I would go home at night.

DNR: Now tell me how you got down to Winterset. How did you get signed up?

Clarence: Boone.

DNR: OK, Winterset was where you were assigned too. Signed up at the post office like maybe, remember?

Clarence: Don't even remember, they had to talk to you first to see if you could get in or not, another fellow his folks were coal miners, I got in and he didn't.

DNR: So you went through kind of an interview process to get in there?

Clarence: Yes, you had to that was the point to get in there.

DNR: Were you ever transferred? Was your whole 6 months at Winterset?

Clarence: 6 months, has nothing to do with being in the 3 C's, well I was I not transferred. Well, I can tell you when I went down there we were working we would go out and help the farmers and help them with soil erosion and plant seed and the farmers would just welcome you with open arms and Winterset was just tickled to death to have us come down, because they would be getting a little bit of income.

DNR: Sure, that you would spend in town. Ok, so you were in Winterset the whole time.

Clarence: Not all of the time no.

DNR: Your camp was always there.

Clarence: Yes, the camp was always there.

DNR: But you would travel out away from work?

Clarence: Well yes, out and around the farm, yes.

DNR: You don't remember when you went in Clarence?

Clarence: No. I really don't.

DNR: You not the only one that doesn't remember that.

Clarence: I am lucky to remember anything. (Laughter.)

DNR: Some of those guys when they got out got a discharge paper I have run in to two or three of them that had those. How about when your first went in there what was the first day like when you went down to camp? Do you remember Clarence? You signed up at Boone and then how they take you down.

Clarence: Well they took us down to the barracks, we went in and they gave us Army clothing.

DNR: They take you down in a truck or something?

Clarence: Yah, an Army truck with a big canvas over the top of it. We got on at Boone and drove down to Winterset. I was down there in Winterset, just not sure how long it was but I remembered pink eye was going through the camp. And when you went through the camp they always sent you up to the Army hospital in Fort Des Moines, for treatment.

DNR: Did several of you have that pink eye?

Clarence: Oh yah, I had it.

DNR: So you were sent up to the hospital in Fort Des Moines, do you remember how long you were there, do you remember?

Clarence: A long time. I transferred up to Winterset up to the hospital. The hospital could take anybody they wanted so they needed help so if I wanted to

transfer, so I transferred up to there. I now worked up there. So when I got over the pink eye I was just ordinary labor.

DNR: That is interesting. I will get back to you after that, I have more questions about that. When you went down to Winterset to the barracks, they gave you clothes.

Clarence: Yes, there was a huge line, I am not sure but I guess there were about 200 of us.

DNR: That gave you clothes?

Clarence: Yah, what do they call that? Army, certain name of clothing. I can't think what that is.

DNR: How about shaving kits and combs, did they give you that stuff, do you remember?

Clarence: I don't remember, but I am sure they did, I don't remember.

DNR: Were those barracks down there wooden barracks?

Clarence: Yes they were.

DNR: So getting your room or barrack assignment they told you guys go here and you guys go there, is that how they did that?

Clarence: They took you right to where you were going to go, to what you were going to be in. And then you had bunk beds, one up and one down below and one up.

DNR: Ok. Some of those guys that I have talked to that went in early stayed in tents. And one guy said they railroad cars that had been converted to barracks.

Clarence: No, I never heard of that.

DNR: So these were wooden barracks. Got any idea how many men were in those barracks? You thought there were about 200 in the camp. That was the average size of the camp by the way. That was about the average size of the camp anyway.

Clarence: Oh, I don't know.

DNR: How about your mattress and your blanket was all that government issued?

Clarence: Yes, that was all government issued.

DNR: Did you take any personal items down there with you when you went?

Clarence: Well, I didn't have to take very much; I don't know what I took, if I took anything. They told me I didn't have to take anything because I was supplied with it.

DNR: Most of the guys that I talked to said the only thing I took was what I had on cause that is all I had.

Clarence: Yah.

DNR: How were those barracks kept warm. Were you there in the winter time or the cold period?

Clarence: They had these big stoves called Depot stoves, they had one down at one end and another up the other way. And it really kept it warm until they banked it the stove, the wood burning stove and then the barracks got cold, very cold. And in the morning you would get up and get your clothes on and run down to the mess and that food was delicious.

DNR: How about the stoves, who keep them going?

Clarence: Somebody in the barracks that was assigned to take care of them. Ok, I don't know.

DNR: Do you remember any of your bunkmates any of the guys that you were in there with?

Clarence: Woody Woodrift was my bunkmate.

DNR: Where was he from, do you remember?

Clarence: He was from Boone.

DNR: Ever keep in touch with him?

Clarence: No.

DNR: How did you guys get along?

Clarence: Well when we first got in together, he apparently liked to wrestle with everybody, every body on the truck he wanted to wrestle. And I said boy I sure don't want to be around him when I get down there. And low and behold he was my bunk mate.

DNR: You talk about bad luck. (Laughter.)

Clarence: He turned out to be one of my best friends I ever had.

DNR: Good, good. So did you know him before you went down there?

Clarence: No, no I didn't know him from a load of oats.

DNR: How did you know he was inclined to want to wrestle and everything?

Clarence: I don't know where he learned it or how he got it, apparently he had wrestled and he was good.

DNR: He kind of had a reputation and it was probably talked about by the guys.

Clarence: I remember one time, some fellow came in with a wrestler and had a show and charge people to get in and who was wrestling and he was getting the best of this guy and then he got a cramp in his stomach and he just folded. He was good. But he and I got to become friends and he was such a nice person and when you just got to know him. He wanted to teach me how to wrestle and I didn't want to learn.

I said I don't like to fight.

DNR: Did you ever know what happened to him after the CCC's?

Clarence: Well, I left down there and he was probably still there.

DNR: You went to the Fort Des Moines Hospital while he was probably still there.

Clarence: I don't know.

DNR: You started to say something earlier about the food, Clarence, how was it, pretty good?

Clarence: It was delicious, when you jumped out of bed and you got your clothes on and you went down there and set down that food was delicious.

DNR: Who did the cooking down there?

Clarence: I don't know.

DNR: Some magical person down there. About everybody that I talked to said the food was good. Would you stay there during the holidays or would you go home?

Clarence: Well if we had

